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U.S. Cautious on Delay By Israelis Over Pollard

Team Waiting to Interview Diplomats

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U.S. officials reacted cautiously yesterday to Israel's delay in permitting a delegation of State and Justice Department officials to visit Israel to interview Israelis implicated in the activities of alleged spy Jonathan Jay Pollard.

Despite indications that some Justice Department officials are irritated at the delay, officials from both departments declined to discuss publicly the status of intense negotiations that have followed Sunday's telephone conversation between Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Shultz and Peres agreed in principle that any classified documents Israel allegedly obtained from Pollard, a civilian Navy counterterrorism analyst, would be returned to the United States and U.S. officials would be permitted to interview Israeli diplomats said to be involved with Pollard.

U.S. officials have privately noted that despite a flurry of disclosures from Israel over the last week the Israelis have still not agreed to a formal framework that will allow the United States to learn the extent of Pollard's alleged spying and the possible damage.

"We've had plenty of discussions," said one official.

"We continue to ask for a response," said another U.S. official familiar with the case. But it appears the Israelis are "still trying to decide how to handle the thing."

The official said that U.S. and Israeli officials are in constant communication and the State Department has given Israel a tentative list of officials that would go there. The list is said to include State Department legal adviser Abraham D. Sofaer and representatives from the Justice Department and FBI.

Some U.S. officials appear irritated at the delay.

Top State and Justice Department officials met to discuss the situation yesterday afternoon; one official said afterward the United States hopes for an agreement within a day or so.

State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb replied to questions about the delays by saying, "I will reiterate what [Shultz] said over the weekend, that the Israelis have assured us that they will work cooperatively with our law enforcement officials, and we have full confidence in those assurances."

Other department officials said privately that they knew of no reason to contradict that public position, and they stressed that internal department discussions this week have given no hint that Shultz or other senior department officials are growing impatient at Israel's delay in inviting the U.S. team.

Officials said Shultz regards Peres as a genuine friend of the United States whose word can be trusted; and, they said, there has been no sign that the secretary may revise that attitude.

The Israeli Embassy is understood to be concerned about persistent reports that some U.S. officials are dissatisfied, and the embassy is believed to have advised Jerusalem that further delays could exacerbate the potential for trouble with these agencies.

Israeli sources here, while declining to discuss the matter publicly, said Israel fully intends to comply with Peres' promises to Shultz.

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